



October 6, 2010

Agreement on new commitments for Hanford tank waste cleanup sent to federal judge

RICHLAND, Wash. – The U.S. Department of Energy and Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) jointly filed a motion today in U.S. District Court asking the court to approve and enter a judicial consent decree that imposes a new, enforceable, and achievable schedule for cleaning up waste from Hanford’s underground tanks. The settlement also includes new milestones in the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA), an administrative order between DOE, Ecology, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which governs cleanup at DOE’s Hanford Site.

“Today’s agreement represents an important milestone in the ongoing cleanup efforts at the Hanford Site,” said U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu. “This will ensure our continued progress as we work to meet our commitments to the State of Washington to protect the environment, the public and the Columbia River.”

“We now have the full commitment of the federal government, and an enforceable federal court order, to ensure that the Hanford cleanup will stay on track,” said Washington Governor Chris Gregoire. “In reaching this agreement with our state, President Obama and Energy Secretary Steven Chu have shown that our federal government can and will live up to the commitments that were made in 1989 to clean up the toxic and radioactive legacy of America’s Cold War nuclear weapons program. This is good news for our state and region – and for the Columbia River and all who depend on it.”

“This consent decree represents the beginning of a new level of accountability for the federal government when it comes to Hanford cleanup over the next 40 years,” said Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna. “I’m proud to join my fellow state and federal leaders in moving this settlement along for the families, businesses and environment of the Tri-Cities.”

Energy Secretary Chu, Governor Gregoire, Attorney General McKenna and other state and federal officials announced the proposed consent decree and modifications to the TPA in August 2009, and committed to receiving input from stakeholders and interested governments prior to finalizing it. The TPA amendments were signed by DOE, Ecology and EPA earlier this week. Both aspects of the settlement (the TPA modifications and the consent decree) become final when the consent decree is approved and entered by a federal judge.

The consent decree is the product of several years of negotiations by the parties and is part of the settlement of a lawsuit that Ecology filed against DOE that was later joined by the state of Oregon to compel the completion of key aspects of the Hanford cleanup.

Hanford currently stores over 53 million gallons of radioactive and chemical waste in 177 underground tanks at the site. The Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) is being designed and built to immobilize the tank waste in a glass form in a process called vitrification.

Key points of the agreement:

- Pacing milestones to keep construction of the WTP on schedule.
- Completion of the retrieval of single-shell tanks in Hanford's C Farm in 2014.
- Treatment of tank waste beginning in 2019 with full operations in 2022.
- Completing the retrieval of all single-shell tanks in 2040.
- Completing the treatment of tank waste in 2047.
- Closing the double-shell tank farms in 2052.

In addition, DOE and the state of Oregon have also agreed upon a consent decree that recognizes Oregon's interest in the cleanup effort and provides Oregon the right to receive copies of certain reports and notices, the right to participate as an observer in joint three-year reviews, and prior notice of any motion to modify the consent decree with Washington State.

The TPA agencies considered input from the public, tribal nations, the state of Oregon, the Hanford Advisory Board, and many stakeholders on the proposed consent decree and milestone changes before they were finalized.

Information about the consent decree and TPA modifications can be found at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/2008lawsuit_settlement.htm. Summary responses to the comments received from the public, tribal nations and others can be found at <http://www5.hanford.gov/arpir/?content=findpage&AKey=1010040009>.

Additional Comments from the Obama Administration and Elected Officials from the State of Washington

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder: Because of this historic settlement, Washington State, Oregon and the federal government will be able to clean up this site and ensure a healthy environment for future generations. This Administration is committed to protecting the environment in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the country.

U.S. EPA Region 10 Administrator Dennis McLerran: We support any and all actions that move the Hanford cleanup forward. This cleanup will take generations of hard work and tough, pragmatic decisions. Today's settlement means we can now move ahead on one of the biggest environmental challenges we face as a nation.

U.S. Senator Patty Murray: This agreement represents a clear path forward toward our Hanford cleanup goals. But to meet those goals, we need to follow through with consistent budgets and a clear commitment to smart cleanup policies. The people of the Tri-Cities have done everything that's been asked of them. When we needed them to sacrifice to protect our nation during World War II and the Cold War, they stepped up. And when we needed them to help clean up the contamination left behind, they stepped up again. So we not only have a legal obligation to meet cleanup milestones, we have a moral obligation to make sure this community's sacrifices are being honored.

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell: This long-overdue agreement is welcome news for the health of the Columbia River and the future of the Tri-Cities. This new blueprint will provide greater accountability on the federal government's obligations to clean up Hanford, greater certainty in terms of the timeline, and hasten the transition to other productive uses for the site, such as a clean energy park.

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For more information

Hanford web site: www.hanford.gov

Washington Department of Ecology web site: www.ecy.wa.gov

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